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ABSTRACT

Youth development lies at the heart of the Workforce Investment Act and the Youth Opportunity Movement. Like employment training programs for adults, employment training programs for youth should focus on acquisition of skills, gainful employment, and productive citizenship. Beyond these three characteristics, it is essential that programs for youth incorporate the following key principles of youth development: (1) have a clear, well articulated "theory" that serves as a reference point for everyone involved; (2) operate within an organizational structure that is as developmental for staff as the program structure is for participants; (3) calculate all policies, programs, decisions, priorities, and designs to help kids build caring relationships with adults and fellow participants; (4) have a membership element that encourages youth to foster an affiliation with and connection to the program; (5) grant broad, genuine responsibility to youth for program design, decision making, and management; (6) make service to community a key program element; (7) provide specific training in leadership and "followership" skills; (8) utilize a planned, well maintained system of recognition and reward; (9) design learning experiences and teaching methods to be as experiential as possible; (10) provide program staff with ample training; and (11) monitor program effectiveness closely and strive for continuous improvement, flexibility, and innovation. (MN)

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Applying the Principles of Youth Development to Youth Opportunity Grants, WIA Formula Funded Programs & Community-Based Youth Programs

Larry Brown, WAVE, Inc.

Introduction

In a quote widely attributed to Einstein, he said,

> "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, expecting a different result."

That quote, even in its brevity, provides all the rationale needed to understand why the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) is different from the previous 30 years of Federal youth employment policy. Furthermore, within the recently implemented Youth Opportunity Grants we can see a profound determination to do things differently. The legislative provisions that encourage youth employment training programs to be based on the fundamental principles of youth development best manifest the difference.

Principles of Effective Youth Development

Youth development is at the heart of the Workforce Investment Act and the Youth Opportunity Movement. Legislative changes that encourage intensive staffing, extended follow-up, leadership training, community service, and youth participation in policy making are ample testament to Congress' determination that formula-funded youth programs and Youth Opportunity Grants be a break from the insanity of doing the same thing over and over again. We at WAVE want to encourage each of you to make the same break.

The design of employment training programs for adults and youth ought to be the same in just three aspects. Both should expect that the acquisition of skills, gainful employment, and productive citizenship would be the result. Beyond those three characteristics, every other element of design must be different for the simple reason that youth, particularly young adolescents, are in developmental turmoil and even within the same age cohort, youth will demonstrate a wide range of developmental skills. As a consequence, it's essential that programs for youth pay great cognizance to the principles of youth development.

Eleven Key Elements of Effective Youth Development Programs

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Practice in effective youth development programs embodies some aspect of each of these elements:

1. Effective youth development programs have a clear, well-articulated "theory" that guides everyone involved.

2. Youth development programs operate within an organizational structure that is as developmental for the staff as the program structure is for participants.

3. Every policy, each program, all decisions, any priority and all designs in effective youth development programs are calculated to help kids build caring relationships with adults and fellow participants.

4. The best programs have a membership element that encourages youth to foster an affiliation with and connection to the program.

5. Good youth development programs grant broad, genuine responsibility to youth for program design, decision-making, and management.

6. Youth development programs make service to community a key program element.

7. There is specific training in the skills of leadership and "followership" in effective youth development programs.

8. Effective youth development programs employ a planned, well-maintained system of recognition and reward.

9. Learning experience and teaching methods in effective youth development programs are designed to be experiential to the greatest extent possible.

10. The staff of effective youth development programs should be provided with training, training and more training.

11. Quality programs closely monitor their effectiveness, strive for continuous improvement and are flexible and innovative, capable of responding to changing circumstances and needs.

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1. Effective youth development programs have a clear, well-articulated "theory" that serves as a reference point for everyone involved.

The theory we prefer at WAVE is that youth development is about building sustained relationships between youth and caring adults. Howard Knoll, Region I Youth Director, has a similar theory that youth development is about helping youth move from less maturity to more maturity. By beginning work with such over arching theories, it is easy to make decisions about the kind of people we hire, the way we design our intake or orientation programs, or the balance

we strike between didactic and experiential learning. With a theory such as WAVE's, everything we do is designed to foster relationships. Program design and services simply become elements that support and lend substance to the relationships.

Ask yourself the following questions about your program and organization:

- What is your theory of youth development?
- Does your staff know, understand and act from that theory of youth development?
- Will you embody it in the mission statement you are developing?
- As you wrestle with problems or make design changes, do you assess how it will impact your theory?

Be as broadly inclusive as you can when developing the mission statement and give it a developmental focus. Measure all critical implementation decisions against it. With a mission statement that clearly articulates your determination to fully develop youth, you can enroll kids, hire staff and secure subcontractors, using the mission or "theory" as a unifying theme.

2. Youth development programs operate within an organizational structure that is as developmental for the staff as the program structure is for participants.

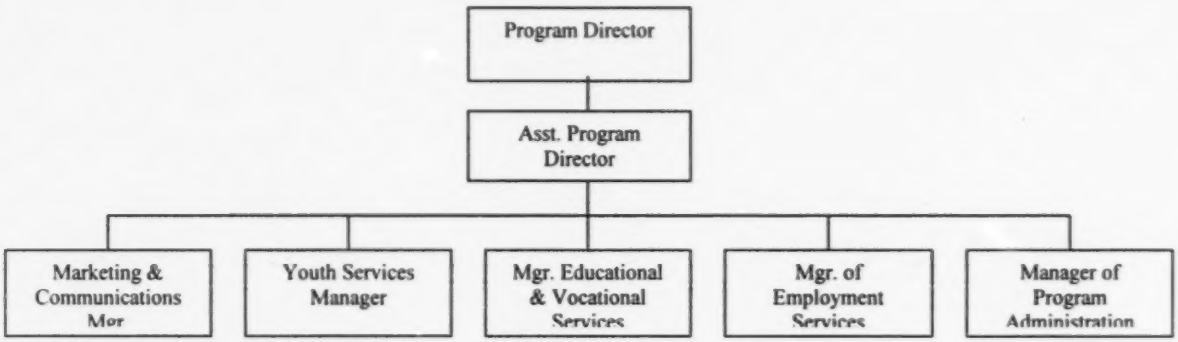
If youth development is about relationship building and the communication that drives it, then a youth development program must operate within an organizational structure that is also designed to foster relationship-building and clear, unencumbered communication between staff. This calls for a relatively flat, non-hierarchical structure where staff can move easily among roles and responsibilities, and where risk-taking is encouraged.

In an organization of this nature, guidelines should predominate over prescriptive policies and staff should be encouraged to move freely within the organization to exercise their responsibilities, solve problems on behalf of kids and become involved in diverse organizational activities. Staff should have responsibilities that are designed to overlap. For an excellent example of how this is done effectively within a vocationally oriented youth development program, I suggest you read the report, Getting In, Staying On, Moving Up. It was prepared by Public Private Ventures, Inc. (**www.ppv.org**) about the work of Vocational Foundation Inc. (VFI) in New York City. VFI is an excellent example of both the benefit of organizing staff roles in a matrix and of the effective application of youth development principles to employment training.

Staff members in a developmental organization are encouraged to talk to whomever they need to talk to or go wherever they need to go to solve problems. Frequently staff will form small, cross-disciplinary teams to work on issues or push the limits of conventional thinking to help a kid. Such an organization will operate under a general consensus that if something goes wrong, no person is at fault, but instead we ought to investigate the "system" to see what can be done to avoid the problem in the future. Managers and supervisors coach instead of directing, and leadership regularly shares the daily responsibilities of line staff. Arbitrary production quotas and numerical, time-defined outcomes are avoided in favor of designing processes that encourage continuous improvement and broad responsibility.

A developmentally designed organizational structure demands leadership that is secure and self-confident, that desires to build caring relationships with staff and that thoroughly enjoys the role of acquiring skills and coaching others. A Coordinator or Director might lead such a structure in a large program with team leaders for Educational and Vocational Services, Employment Services and Youth Services. All of the Youth Development Specialists would work for all three team leaders, having one principal assignment, but moving freely through a matrix of responsibilities as time, need and opportunity dictated. The three team leaders would manage the logistics.

Below is one example of such a management. In small programs, combine related functions.



This grouping or one similar to it would form your management team and all program activities would fall under these managers. This allows a program director a manageable span of control and retains a high level of influence over all aspects of the program's operations. It would be critical from the outset that you convey the message that these categories are not boundaries. They are just descriptors and the project director as well as the managers themselves, will be free to move staff to where they are needed most, to share roles and responsibilities and to combine resources to accomplish tasks. There is always a danger when you define a hierarchy that people seek to build empires by accumulating and guarding information and building up their staff and resources. You will have to be constantly vigilant and inspirational in your efforts to encourage the opposite. These are not silos. They are overlapping spheres of influence.

Each of these managers should in turn be encouraged to have a very flat, non-bureaucratic structure that keeps them in close touch with the activities of their staff, but encourages them to coach rather than oversee and supervise. They should often find themselves in the roles of trainer and counselor to the staff and they should frequently step in and share some of the responsibilities of the front-line staff.

3. **Every policy, each program, all decisions, any priority and all designs in effective youth development programs are calculated to help kids build caring relationships with adults and fellow participants.**

This may seem the most obvious of the principles, but it is often also the hardest to maintain. Budgets, program schedules, administrators, deadlines, MIS systems, parents, policies and myriad other distractions all conspire to prevent us from spending thoughtful time engaged with and listening to kids. Every program should have a sign over the door that says,

> "If it's a choice between doing what has to be done today and spending time with a young person, then spending time with a young person is the only thing that has to be done today."

This principle of youth development affects every program decision. The location, architecture and design of the facility must encourage kids to relate to adults. There must be public space for interaction and private space for confidential conversations. The front desk receptionist, security personnel and intake staff must be trained to make every moment of initial contact a positive one. The first individual a young person speaks to on the phone and sees when she or he walks in the door are the two most important staff people in your program. Train and support them accordingly.

If your theory of youth development is about caring relationships with adults, then the material you use to recruit, the presentations you make to community partners, your intake material and staff presentations to new participants won't speak about jobs and education, they will instead address what youth can expect from the people they meet.

This principle will mean that you won't rush youth into services or jobs. You will deliver on every promise made or quickly and honestly explain why you could not. You will emphasize follow-up only partly because it's required, but mostly because someone really wants to know how the participant is doing. You will encourage kids to initially relate to the program on their own terms. Most important, you will use this principle as a "litmus" test. As you set a policy, design a new program, or procedure or hire a new staff person, you will ask yourself, is this decision going to help our program build caring, engaging relationships between kids and adults? You will insist that your external partners practice the same principles.

Have your marketing and communications people think about designing a few, very strategic communication messages that all staff would use to make exactly the first impression we want to make on prospective enrollees.

Finally, the manner and style with which staff members present themselves to participants, particularly early in their enrollment, is a strong determinant for how effectively a young person bonds with the program. Each moment of the day, from walking in the door, to sitting in class, to speaking with their youth development specialist or playing a game of ping-pong is an opportunity to advance a relationship and capitalize on a teachable moment. Training is the key to helping staff both identify and capitalize on these opportunities.

We want staff members to present themselves as skilled, caring professionals, but their titles, dress, and professional demeanor should reflect the example they wish to set and not become barriers or impediments to how well they connect with the kids.

4. The best programs have a membership element that encourages youth to develop affiliation and connection to the program.

You know that at-risk youth are notorious for being isolated from positive groups. They rarely, if ever, have substantial affiliations with enriching organizations. Many tend to be loners, or if they view themselves as members of any groups, it is often a group with potential adverse connotations such as gangs, crews, dropouts, etc. Sadly, these challenged young people have learned to distrust the very organizations that might provide an escape to better opportunities. That lens of distrust will color the first impression that many have of your program unless you have taken steps to overcome it.

The location, quality, layout and atmosphere of your "youth center" is critical in terms of making a positive first connection with participants and encouraging them to stay. It's equally important that through some form of membership organization, youth easily understand the legitimate roles they will have in the design, management and maintenance of the facility. Your youth center will communicate your approach and attitude toward young people.

The same things that motivate each of us motivate young people, regardless of their background. We have a desire to achieve, to be safe, to care and be cared for, and to be respected. Many of the young people we work with have neither the experience, the resources, nor the trust to break the cycle they're caught in. Give them a chance to feel accepted and become a productive member of a positive youth development organization and they will readily accept it.

In WAVE programs throughout the country, the WAVE Leadership Association (WLA) provides that opportunity for a positive affiliation. It is a membership organization where youth can experience belonging, participation, cooperation and leadership on their own terms. It is the most important aspect of our programs for out-of-school youth, but we also use it in school-based programs. We capitalize on the youthful qualities that others view as problems. Therefore, a youngster's need for identity can become fuel for active involvement in a Leadership Association rather than a gang. Their longing to find a place in the world can find release in employment preparation or community service instead of crime and violence. Each participant is an "Associate," because they share a role in the leadership of the association and of the overall program. We encourage you to develop a similar organization.

A local leadership association can, and should, be a pivotal component of any youth development programming. The primary goal of the organization is to motivate youth toward growth and achievement by providing them with the skills and incentives for being more competent, feeling more confident and becoming more successful in their schools or programs, at work and in their personal relationships. Properly designed and presented, a leadership association might be the sole reason a youth is willing to set aside their distrust and give the program a try.

The young people should manage the leadership association, but staff must play a critical role in establishing and maintaining an effective organization. Staff and volunteers can be easily trained to understand that one of the principal tasks in working effectively with youth is to identify underlying social, vocational and educational needs and to make the leadership

association a vehicle to satisfy those needs in constructive ways. Whether by increasing the frequency of recognition, planning more interactive group exercises or broadening the group's activity in the community, the staff can ensure that the leadership association offers something for each participant. In this way, the staff is instrumental in helping develop the group affinity that spurs accountability and achievement. The leadership opportunities, as well as the underlying philosophy that the leadership association is youth-run, empower the youngsters and provide a secure laboratory for planning, problem solving, and interpersonal interactions. The expectation that leadership association members give something back to the community through civic activities, in turn, gives youth a basis for increased self-esteem and a community laboratory for testing emerging skills.

Initially, a leadership association might appear to youth and staff as a club whose goal is to promote social activities. However, it soon should emerge as an organization that helps put knowledge into action. Through persistent reinforcement of accomplishment, even at the smallest level, a leadership association will create success for youth that seldom are considered successful. The greatest asset of the leadership association will be the re-labeling that will occur in the minds of the Associates themselves.

A fully developed youth organization will take thoughtful planning and execution. But once in place, it will become your single most important program element. We encourage you to do it and would be pleased to help. Working this element of effective youth development programs into your program design may be the most important step you take to ensure success.

5. **Good youth development programs grant broad, genuine responsibility to youth for program design, decision-making and management.**

This does not mean ceding responsibility for decision-making. It means sharing it, and it is perhaps the most difficult aspect of youth development programming for even the most zealous of youth advocates to implement. The concept is hard to put into practice, because these kids are still just kids and need counsel, training, and patience to be able to execute thoughtful decisions. It is hard work for staff to forgo all the pressing day-to-day responsibilities to teach kids how to lead and govern, but it is essential to their success. In this context, it is easy to understand Howard Knoll's theory that our job is to help youth move from less mature to more mature. Assuming responsibility and making responsible decisions are among the most mature of activities.

This youth development principle is also the most critical to the sustained success of your program, because it represents grant genuine ownership of the program to the young people in a manner that promotes trust. Ownership establishes implicit responsibility for governance, order and outcome. When word reaches the street that youth are shared owners of your program, it will stand out among all programs that came before. The success of programs such as YouthBuild and Community Service Corps is ample evidence of the critical nature of this concept.

Implementation of this principle requires a well-trained staff person who is dedicated to the task of training and supporting the young people. It must be a staff person who understands the delicate role of promoting freedom and responsibility while also teaching appropriate limits.

Even if you do not develop a full membership organization, you will want to create some structure that involves youth in the governance of the program.

6. Youth development programs make service to community a key program element.

Community service is among the best examples of experiential learning. As one handbook on learning explains, "Experiential learning occurs when a person engages in some activity, looks back at the activity critically, abstracts some useful insight, and puts the result to work." This type of learning is important not only because it is a more effective way of imparting skills to young people, but also because it gives young people needed linkages to the workplace and community. In this way, it helps youth overcome the alienation that is often a core reason for their failure to achieve.

Community service combined with structured reflection and learning is a powerful strategy to help young people expand their social horizons, develop critical thinking skills and civic awareness, improve their sense of self-worth and belonging, and develop job contacts. Most important, it endows youth, in a powerful and passionate way, with the core understanding that finding meaning in oneself begins by lending meaning to the lives of others.

Community service provides youth with an important sense of accomplishment. Indeed, young people often report more tangible social benefits from their community service work than from their first paid work experience. The feeling of being valued as workers is crucial to their development and future success. As Harvard Professor Harold Howe explained,

> "In a society based on the work ethic, work helps to define each one of us. To the extent that we do something useful to the society, we gain a feeling of belonging and contributing that sustains us even when the work we do is difficult or dull.... Young people have been progressively denied the opportunity to be engaged in work that is important to others and therefore denied the rewards such work produces. I think that some of youth's negative tendencies today can be traced to this situation."

Adolescents who work together with their peers to assist the handicapped, serve food to the hungry or homeless, bring Christmas toys to a poor family, visit the elderly, clean up a local park, renovate a building, or participate in programs to educate other youth about substance abuse are likely to feel much more valued than they might through their early experiences in the workplace. This is likely to be true whether that first work experience is a food-service job flipping hamburgers, a retail job, or even an apprenticeship position in the field of a person's dreams.

A quality community service component means more than just engaging youth in one or two service projects through the course of a year --- although this is a good start. Experts in education distinguish between community service and what now is called service learning.

Service learning is a structured vehicle for helping youth get the most out of community service experiences. Effective service learning means including youth in the planning process, preparing the young people for the experience, and giving them ongoing, structured opportunities to reflect on the experience.

To establish an effective service learning component, build it into your program's membership or leadership organization and make it a feature of your program's orientation. Begin planning by brainstorming with the youth and listing every potential service activity you can think of for your community. Then, allow youth to select their own priorities. Work with them to develop plans to carry out these activities. Whom will they need to contact? What do they need to do to carry out the plan? Teach them how to build the service experience into their resumes and how to network with the people they meet. Finally, have regular meetings with the youth throughout the project to reflect on what they are learning, their frustrations or disappointments, and to share in their pride and sense of accomplishment.

7. **There is specific training in the skills of leadership and "followership" in effective youth development programs.**

The literature is thick on the theory and practice of leadership development, but it is rarely used in youth programs. Furthermore, when it is used, leadership is rarely taught side-by-side with theories of group dynamics and participation or what we refer to as "followership." Both are critical for participants because many will be coming from roles on the street where they were clearly defined as either leaders or followers. Yet, their street experience will not translate easily into the new leader and follower roles required of them in the program and the workplace. So, specific training is necessary to help them retain the skills they learned on the street and use them as a foundation for the new skills they will need at work.

8. **Effective youth development programs employ a planned, well-maintained system of recognition and reward.**

If you develop a leadership association or other membership organization, you can conduct the recognition program within the structure of either of those organizations. If you do not have a leadership organization, it is still critical that you develop, publicize and faithfully maintain a structure of recognition for program achievements.

There is no substitute for a recognition program. Kids, staff, parents, funders and the community will all love it. You should design a program that grants recognition for increasingly more difficult achievement in a manner that provides reinforcement for program, community and work-related accomplishments. At WAVE, we recommend a series of monthly, quarterly and annual awards for attendance, academic achievements, community service, leadership, employment, promotion, retention, etc. To the greatest extent possible, the achievements should be on a noncompetitive basis so that anyone who achieves certain standards receives the recognition, but there is also benefit in a few competitive awards. It is important, though, that awards be tiered in such a manner that even the most recent or most struggling participants are accorded their moment in the spotlight.

The recognition program ought also to extend to employers, donors, staff, etc.

Before a recognition program is implemented, it must be well thought out, clearly articulated and explained to staff and youth, and you must commit to administering it with fairness and promptness. Thus, if you commit to a monthly program, carry it out faithfully.

9. Learning experience and teaching methods in effective youth development programs are designed to be experiential to the greatest extent possible.

Tell me and I forget.
Show me and I remember.
But let me and I understand.
— Confucius

We know that most youth learn more effectively through active learning methods than through conventional teaching techniques like lectures, reading or written assignments. Traditional educational methods are particularly unlikely to work well for high school dropouts and other at-risk youngsters, since these techniques have proven ineffective in meeting their needs in the past.

Consider that people generally remember:

10 percent of what they read
20 percent of what they hear
30 percent of what they see in a visual aid or picture
50 percent of what they see and hear
70 percent of what they say or write
90 percent of what they say as they perform a task or do a demonstration

The youth we work will typically resist the social control, competition and conventional roles that characterize most traditional school classrooms. As a result, participants are likely to need to learn in context, to work cooperatively, and to learn by doing and experimenting.

In order to engage and truly educate a youngster, you need to do more than just teach by rote from a written curriculum or textbook. Our job, as teachers and trainers, is more than just imparting knowledge. Our goal should be to broadly assess each individual's learning needs and style, and then help each young person master skills through a wide range of teaching techniques and learning environments.

Furthermore, experiences outside the classroom, such as community service, work experience and work-based learning, are vital elements of the experiential learning process. Yet, the techniques and strategies employed within your learning center are also important. Computer-assisted learning can be a good way of engaging young people in their own learning process and pacing learning to each individual's needs. But remember if our theory of youth development is about creating caring relationships between adults and kids, computer-assisted instruction should be guided by an adult mentor. One-on-one instruction is also a good way of pacing learning to each individual's needs and engaging students in discussion and reflective thinking.

However, to the maximum extent possible, it is important to engage learners in group activities, cooperative learning and active applications like role-playing, brainstorming and team teaching. Learning is an active process, and the more you involve your students, the more they will absorb. Everyone learns at a different pace and through different methods, but young people can help each other learn. Finally, keep in mind that learning is emotional as well as intellectual. Young people are more apt to learn in an environment where they feel valued, and where they have a close relationship with at least one adult and their fellow students. So give each of them a chance to be a teacher as well as a student, and make frequent use of teams composed of both adults and students.

To the maximum extent possible, youth ought to be provided with multiple learning environments and staff should have a broad understanding of Howard Gardner's concept of multiple intelligences (see Howard Gardner's books: *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* and *Multiple Intelligences: the Theory in Practice).*

Any of your staff members who are going to conduct orientation sessions, classroom training or lead groups of youth should have some training in experiential learning methods. Your orientation session will let young people know if they are entering an environment that is different from their experiences with traditional schools and other programs. Since many young people who seek out your program did not experience success in traditional settings, a "traditional" orientation may result in a youth choosing not to return. It is important that in any contact a participant has with an element of your program that is run by a partner or subcontractor she or he encounters the same philosophy about working with young people. You should survey your sub-contractors on what they use as a prevalent teaching style and you should favor those who use experiential learning. Include sub-contractor staff in your trainings to ensure that experiential learning methodologies and youth development principles are shared and adhered to across the program.

10. The staff of effective youth development programs should be provided training, training and more training.

Our best chance to develop skills and nurture motivation in youth is to first do the same for our staff. People, not programs, make the greatest difference in young lives and ongoing training is the key to developing and sustaining good people.

Staff should be encouraged to seek out and attend classes and workshops in youth development, program administrators should plan regular (monthly or bi-weekly) in-service training events, and when it is available. The single most effective step you can take to improve your program's effectiveness and its sustained impact is to have an ambitious staff development program.

The training provided should run the range from effective business practice to organizational design and development, current learning theory, adolescent development, systems analysis design, workforce development and any of the many other subjects in between. The rare organization sets aside three percent of its budget for staff development; a great organization commits two percent and a good organization at least one.

11. Quality programs closely monitor their effectiveness, strive for continuous improvement and are flexible and innovative, capable of responding to changing circumstances and needs.

Most programs dread evaluation and the process of monitoring their program's "numbers" for the respective funding sources. However, properly conducted, internal evaluation can truly be the life-blood of your program. It can provide you with the information you need for making your programs more successful. Data can make the invisible visible. They will tell you things you may not readily see about your program's design and impact.

The program performance measures that will be required as part of WIA or YO grant reporting requirements will obviously determine much of the data you collect and how you report it. However, the core purpose of any information you collect should be to help you. The kind of questions you might seek to answer in order to discover hidden aspects of your program include:

- Why do some kids show up a few times and never return?
- Where do participants spend their time and how much do they invest in the program both initially and over time?
- What was their motivation for coming and what motivated them to stay?
- What is the word on the street about your program? Does it vary over time?
- Do participants show documented changes in attitude or self-esteem?
- What do participants think of the program and what it has done for them?
- Do the number of hours spent in the program correlate to program outcomes?
- Are there certain types of young people your program manages to serve better than others?
- Which staff are the participants gravitating towards and why?
- Is the source of your new participant referrals varying over time? Why?

The process of measuring youth development is an inexact science at best, but there are many ways of using data to help you, "make the invisible visible."

- Measure every contact hour that a participant has with the youth center, a program staff person or a subcontractor. Also, measure the relative changes in contact time. This will tell you whether a young person is comfortable and whether s/he is building trust.

- Measure the relative differences between the amount of contact time a participant has in training and education versus recreation, leadership activities, community service, etc. The better the balance, the more likely it is you are doing youth development.

- Assess the relative change in statements a participant makes about why they are enrolling in the program versus what they say later about why they are staying involved. If the answers move from specific answers about getting a job or a GED to more general answers about learning, making friends and building relationships with instructors, you are on the right track.

- Conduct pre and post measures of the participant's assessment of the trust level they have for staff members and the program itself.

- The participation rates you have in your membership organization and its activities will correlate directly to the developmental impact you are having on kids.

- You might also investigate the "Youth Development and Student Learning (YSDL) Inventory" from the Yale Child Study Center. Drs. Norris Haynes and Michael Ben-Avie have created the Youth Development and Student Learning Inventory which measures resiliency, academic persistence, conduct, problem solving in math and science, communication skills, peer bonding, engagement with adults, and future orientation. See http://info.med.yale.edu/comer/ysdl.html.

These are just a few examples. The kids themselves can help you come up with others.

These questions can be answered through quantitative data, follow-up surveys, rubrics, interviews with participants and employers, and through diagnostic tests of basic skills, self-esteem and other outcomes.

Finally, don't make the mistake of thinking that data collection is only about finding out how you are doing. It's also about learning in advance what changes need to be made to correct weaknesses or respond to changing expectations of the young people. As you assemble your staff, get everyone working together to identify the kind of indicators that might tell you something is going on with the kids, staff or program. Then devise simple data gathering tools to monitor those indicators. Over time, you will abandon some and add others, but I guarantee that some will give you advance indication of a minor issue that could have grown into a debilitating problem. You ought to consider including some "youth development" measures such as the number of youth in recreational programs, the number involved in community service and attendance at motivational activities.

Website Resources

- National Youth Development Information Center www.nydic.org
- National Youth Employment Coalition www.nyec.org
- Work, Achievement, Values and Education www.waveinc.org

Conclusion

As we implement youth programs, we will all be called upon to document the impact our work has on young people. So as we wrestle with performance measures, we would be wise to recognize that often the most profound outcomes are made by the smallest differences (see The Tipping Point by Malcolm Gladwell, Little Brown, 2000). Whether we are trying to encourage educational attainment, skills training or job placements, we must always remind ourselves to do "first things first." With youth, the first things are to engage their attention and win their trust. Practicing effective youth development is the "small thing" that will lead to the most profound performance.